

VZCZCXRO1881
PP RUEHFL RUEHKW RUEHLA RUEHROV RUEHSR
DE RUEHVB #0311/01 0671016
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 081016Z MAR 06
FM AMEMBASSY ZAGREB
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 5816
INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ZAGREB 000311

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/07/2016

TAGS: [PREL](#) [HR](#)

SUBJECT: CROATIA DETERMINED TO RESOLVE LINGERING ISSUES
WITH NEIGHBORS, CEMENT REGIONAL STABILITY

REF: ZAGREB 295

Classified By: Ambassador Ralph Frank for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary and comment: MFA State Secretary Hido Biscevic briefed Ambassador March 1 on PM Sanader,s February 28 meetings in Tirana with Albanian and Macedonian officials, and laid out the GOC,s plans to resolve a number of lingering bilateral issues with Bosnia and Herzegovina (BIH) and Serbia and Montenegro (SAM). Biscevic underscored the PM,s commitment to contributing to regional stability and helping to build a viable new security architecture as the region enters a crucial period. He emphasized that the GOC seeks an active bilateral relationship with Belgrade, and noted that Croatian chairmanship of the SEECP (Southeast Europe Cooperation Process) beginning in May offers another opportunity for Croatia to exercise responsible regional leadership over the coming year. We are encouraged by the GOC,s expressed desire to clear up nagging issues with its neighbors, and by its thoughtful planning for the SEECP chair. End summary and comment.

A-3 Meetings in Tirana

¶2. (C) Biscevic reported that the PM had met with his Albanian counterpart to review bilateral economic issues, but the bulk of the A-3 meeting, which took place in a positive atmosphere, was about the regional situation. He said it was evident that all three PMs wanted to cooperate in contributing to regional stability; they also addressed their "ambitions" for the Riga NATO Summit. (Note: The GOC has publicly announced its desire for a 2008 invitation, stepping back from previous feelers for an earlier invitation. Croatian ambitions for Riga are more limited: to attend the Summit, and to have helpful communicate language.

Kosovo and Montenegro: Threats to Regional Stability

¶3. (C) With regard to Kosovo, Biscevic said the GOC was looking for a balanced, measured approach. He warned that while "some friendly capitals" (meaning the U.S. among others) see things as settled, great care must be taken about reaction in the region. Ambassador Frank encouraged Biscevic to be in touch with UNSYG Special Envoy Ahtisaari as it is vital to do nothing which could potentially complicate his work.

¶4. (C) On Montenegro, Biscevic asserted that the GOC wants to engage helpfully in the post-referendum period. He believes Belgrade has accepted the loss of Montenegro and that it will "boil down to technical issues" following the vote. He praised the work of EU special envoy Lajcak (as former Slovakian deputy FM, a close friend and colleague of Biscevic).

SAM: Looking for Continued Engagement and Quick Resolution

of Border Demarkation and Lists of Missing Persons and War-crimes Indictees

15. (C) Biscevic noted that PM Sanader wants to continue his personal engagement with his Serbian counterpart, meeting next with Kostunica probably at the European Peoples Party Congress in Rome on March 30. Biscevic described the border issue with SAM, essentially a matter of accounting for rivers shifting course over many years, as "easier to resolve" than that with Slovenia (see reftel) and easier to accommodate politically, perhaps at the next meeting of the formal border commission. He acknowledged that the Radicals in SAM had an interest in keeping the issue open to undermine Kostunica. He also noted that resolving the border issue would help the GOC domestically on the refugee issue.

16. (C) Biscevic only touched on the missing persons list as a minor bilateral irritant the GOC is eager to resolve. (Note: The GOC hosted an early-February bilateral meeting of the two national Missing Persons Commissions, the first in over two years; the International Committee on Missing Persons (ICMP) attended as an observer. Around 2500 persons are still missing in Croatia, while Serbia has nearly completed identification of its missing. The ICMP characterized the meeting as productive.

17. (C) Regarding the list of (mainly) ethnic Serbs indicted or convicted in absentia for war crimes in Croatia, Biscevic indicated that the chief state prosecutor had nearly completed "consolidating" this list so that it could be provided to SAM authorities. (Note: In fact preliminary lists have changed hands already, according to the prosecutor's office. Ideally the list will be made

ZAGREB 00000311 002 OF 002

public so that refugees fearing to return will know whether there are indictments pending; all those convicted in absentia have an automatic right to a new trial, and most new trials result in overturning the original verdict.

BIH: GOC Will Seek New Ploce Agreement; Will Resolve Neum Border

18. (C) Biscevic reported that PM Sanader would travel to Sarajevo the first week of May. Before that trip, he expected a working group to resolve the one small border issue at Neum based on some new documentation. He noted that the GOC wanted a new agreement on Ploce that is not linked to transit through Neum, because the Parliament would not accept it. A new agreement based on "European practice" would be sought, with representatives of BiH concessionaries on the port's governing board. Biscevic said PM Terzic had seemed positively inclined, but with elections coming in October he may be under pressure.

SEECF: Croatian Plans for Southeast Europe Cooperation Process Chair

19. (C) Noting that Croatia would take over the chair of the SEECF in May, Biscevic said the GOC saw this as a challenging period during which the group's members would all be affected by events in Kosovo and Montenegro, and planned to use the institution to promote stability and consultation. Looking to the future, the GOC hoped to gradually merge several Stability Pact activities into the SEECF, including education, energy, infrastructure, investment and economic development. As the Stability Pact withdraws from these areas, the SEECF could step in. Clearly a link with the EU was needed, perhaps through an SEECF office in Brussels. These were preliminary ideas but, Biscevic said, the GOC saw the SEECF as a potential tool for bringing the Euro-Atlantic vision more deeply into the region. He optimistically stated that in ten years, it would no longer be needed.

FRANK